THE GENIUS OF THE MARNE

A PLAY IN THREE SCENES

BY

JOHN LLOYD BALDERSTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
GEORGE MOORE

NICHOLAS L. BROWN
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To a Lady I think has forgotten
A request, and a promise,—
This play, in fulfilment.

INTRODUCTION

BY

GEORGE MOORE

INTRODUCTION

We have lost so many things during the last four years, that for an idea of number we turn to the stars; the endless mystery above us seems greater than the mystery over yonder, but both exceed the compass of our minds. In our armchairs we sit and dream of the burning of the great library at Louvain, of the Cathedrals and the mediæval cities, compendiums and abridgments of the genius of the centuries that gave birth to the one we live in, today lonely ruins in a ragged war-worn land, so torn with shells, exploded and unexploded, that it will remain a desert for a hundred years at least, if not for all time, so we are told. Cambrai, Ypres and Rheims have gone forever, leaving behind them only a little dust:

Ce que le papillon de l'âme
Laisse de poussière apres lui,
Et ce qui reste de la flame
Sur le trépied quand il a lui.

Our thoughts linger for a moment among the multitudinous graves on those hillsides, and are then be-

guiled by names that the fortunes of war made known to us quickly and blotted from our minds almost as quickly. For who thinks now, except by chance, of our own sturdy Marshal of Mons? Names once in every mouth return to us, but we remember them so faintly that as in the ballade we ask — who held the seas in his cabin on board the *Iron Duke* for more than two years; who was Pétain, Cadorna, Castelnau, and of all who was the one-armed legendary hero of those early days in Alsace? and who — we must not blame ourselves that the magical victories of Foch have put Joffre's name out of our minds; put his name out of our minds for the moment, but when we begin to take into account the early months of the struggle it will be discovered whether the attack in the lost provinces was ill-judged and mismanaged, whether Joffre was right or whether he was wrong in ordering his armies across the Meuse and into the Belgian Ardennes in the hope of breaking the German onrush, and pressing them out of Belgium before the leaves of the first Autumn had fallen, and of all whether he could have done else than to give battle at Charleroi. For these disasters Joffre is responsible, no doubt, but the greatness of his decision to retrieve these mistakes will not be forgotten. As we sit in our armchairs our hearts stop beating again when we recall those terrible August days, our armies

streaming back and back, whilst we, and those higher than we, clamored for a stand, for a battle, to save Paris, to save the world. But in spite of all advocacy for battle and the reasons thereof, Joffre continued resolute, his dull response to all entreaty 'I will not fight here,' and whether, as we think in England, that it was because of the rout of the Fifth Army, commanded by Lanrezac, whose name was a black raven in our souls for a few days, and whom we never heard of more, or whether, as some French writers aver, it was because our own heroic five divisions were taken rearwards too quickly, leaving a gap on the extreme left, that made the victory of Guise-St. Quentin of no avail, Joffre continued to mutter 'not here, not here,' putting a strain on the endurance of his soldiers that none but he thought them able to bear, so that he might fight in the end on ground of his own choosing. He continued the retreat mile after mile. How many? sixty? seventy? a hundred? it may be as many, before he reached the Marne, and France had begun to lose faith in her leader, but when the Marne was reached, Joffre said: 'Now!' And it may be that the General's staff at last grasped Joffre's strategy in time. It would seem that the General's staff did, for Joffre's plans were carried out to perfection, as they would be by such generals as Foch and Gallieni, that Gallieni of

the taxi-cabs whose name is already one of saga. Yes; the General's staff must have approved in the end, though in the beginning they doubted, for without perfect apprehension and sympathy the battle of the Marne would have miscarried, without such men as the aforesaid Joffre could have done nothing. There were other minds in the battle of the Marne besides Joffre's, but what the future will take to heart is that Joffre did the right thing at the right time, and so well chosen was the moment that we know now that Moltke the Little told the Kaiser that the war was lost and that he had better make peace. The Kaiser found he could not make peace, and the war dragged on among horrors and cruelties such as the world never knew before, and will perchance not know again, so it is said. Our chronicle stops at the Marne, at Joffre's great victory. The fading of his glory will be told when the war yields up its secrets, but whatever new fact may come to light none will be discovered to disturb or to tarnish his strategy at the Marne; none will ever dispute that he won at the Marne and that, without his victory, France must have been taken and destroyed, Britain and America in their turn attacked, and a destruction commenced of such magnitude that we cannot consider it: like the skies, it is too vast.

But it is George Moore who is writing these words,

and he hears his readers say, 'By what extraordinary pretension does this spinner of tales presume to lecture us upon strategy and tactics?' So let me make confession and say that the little I know about these things is due to my friend Mr. John Lloyd Balderston, who when he was in England came to my house evening after evening, and after we had talked of things nearer my heart, would spread on my table his maps, and as he talked, lines and markings took shape and meaning, and I was able to forget the horror and agony always present in the mind of a man of imagination and follow the interplay of mind against mind, the rules of the game, the reason why such-and-such a general had done this and that; and when I was too optimistic, his maps and their markings tempered my rejoicing and, conversely, when plunged in despair his visits and his maps soothed my sorrow.

One day Mr. Balderston mentioned to me that he was thinking of writing a play and with Joffre for its hero, and after the relation of the plot I asked him what he proposed to call it. 'The Spectre of the Marne,' he answered, a title that suggested a lady called Mrs. Radcliffe, and I begged him to seek another title. The one that comes to my mind while writing this preface is the one that I hope he will adopt: 'Yesterday's Glory,' for what is the

Marne but yesterday's glory! Be this as it may it did not surprise me that in long brooding he had discovered a symbol, a synthesis, an interpretation of the genius that brought about the victory. The mystery of genius has always occupied the mind of man, and the play for which I have been asked to contribute a few lines of introduction is, at least I take it to be, Mr. Balderston's explanation of the inspired tactics of the retreat that led up to the Battle of the Marne. The play contains one scene truly original, one which remains in my mind and will, I think, always remain in the mind of the reader — the scene in which Napoleon appears at the critical moment and dictates to the sleeping general the plan of the battle. Joffre seems to have had the plan of the Battle of the Marne in his mind all the while from Charleroi to the Marne, but it seemed to refuse to take precise shape. The sleep-walking scene, as it appears to me, is admirably introduced by an argument between the General and his staff; each general in turn presses the necessity of a decision on Joffre; a decision must be taken, and at once. But think, reader, what this decision involved — whether Paris was to be destroyed and the retreat continued to the Loire, or whether the world's destiny was to be decided at the Marne. In the middle of the night an exhausted general is called upon to decide.

He pleads for three hours' rest. In three hours he will report his decision to them, and it is in these hours that the plan of the battle is made clear to him.

I was sorry the play could not be produced; though I knew from the beginning that no censor could have passed it while contending factions argued about who won the battle, whether Joffre or Foch or Gallieni or Manoury. But the war is over now, and it cannot be doubted that Foch, the hero of twenty victories from the Marne to the frontier, would be the last to take umbrage at the imaginative concentration of the limelight on Joffre at the Marne. And I do not think the most unintelligent among the audience, if the play be ever acted, will fail to see that this play relies for its interest, not on controversy about facts, but on a purely spiritual issue. Is a man the springhead and source of his ideas, or are they transmitted to him? Mr. Balderston would seem to think that a man of genius is but the mouthpiece of a voice speaking from beyond.

GEORGE MOORE.

CHARACTERS

THE GENERAL,

LIEUTENANT, THE MARQUIS GASTON D'ARGOULLES, *his aide-de-camp,*

THE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS,

THE CHIEF OF STAFF,

COLONEL BONNEL,
MAJOR RAMEAUX, } *of the Headquarters Staff.*

AN ORDERLY,

AN APPARITION.

THE GENIUS OF THE MARNE

SCENE I

The scene is a simply-furnished office in the Mairie of a small town in the Department of the Seine, now the Grand Quartier-Général de France. A lamp is burning on a desk, covered with maps, that stands in the center of the room. There is a door on each side of the room, and, in the rear wall, two windows. The hands of a clock, hanging on the wall between the windows, point to twelve. A daily pad calendar, fastened on the wall below the clock, reads: "September 4, 1914." Maps are pinned about the walls, and fastened on a tripod that stands to the right of the desk is a huge map of Northern France, some eight feet by five. A red circle makes the fortified camp of Paris recognizable, and the coast line is also visible; a strip of red tape across the map indicates the battle line on September 4. There are a few chairs, and, near the left hand door, a couch upon which D'ARGOULLES, *a young man in the early twenties, his Lieutenant's uniform smartly cut, with no decorations, is asleep.*

The right hand door opens, an Orderly, in the 1914 uniform with its red trousers, enters and stands at attention as the DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS *and*

MAJOR RAMEAUX *enter, then goes out and closes the door. The* DIRECTOR *is a man in the fifties, wearing the uniform of a Major-General with the cross of a Commander of the Legion of Honor, and other decorations;* RAMEAUX, *an officer of the Legion, is perhaps forty. Both men are much agitated.*

RAMEAUX

Lieutenant!

(D'ARGOULLES *rises and salutes*)

DIRECTOR

Tell the General I must see him.

D'ARGOULLES

I'm sorry, sir. The General ordered me not to disturb him under any circumstances.

RAMEAUX

The Director of Operations has said that he *must* see the General.

D'ARGOULLES

(*Who is standing firmly before the door, left*) The General's orders, sir. I cannot take the responsibility.

DIRECTOR

Ask the Chief of Staff and Colonel Bonnel if they

will come here at once. You need not come back.

(D'ARGOULLES *salutes and goes out, right*)

RAMEAUX

(*Pacing floor*) Twelve o'clock!

(*Tears September 4 leaf from the calendar, revealing September 5th*)

DIRECTOR

Five weeks!

RAMEAUX

It seems five years.

DIRECTOR

Will you knock at the door?

RAMEAUX

(*Hesitating*) It is for you or the Chief of Staff to call him.

DIRECTOR

(*Doubtfully*) He said he was not to be disturbed. You are sure the wires are cleared?

RAMEAUX

Yes.

DIRECTOR

To all the army headquarters?

RAMEAUX

Yes, they are clear; except when the army generals keep them busy asking instructions, describing their confusion, (*bitterly*) owing to our failure to explain our plans.

DIRECTOR

I know. We must represent the situation as it is. We must obtain the General's orders at once.

RAMEAUX

They are upside down in Paris. To evacuate and surrender the city or to stand a siege — to clear the troops out, or to bring more in — to get more food supplies or to destroy what they have — they keep begging us for orders, and we can only tell them they will receive their orders — later!

DIRECTOR

Rameaux! We must trust the General!

RAMEAUX

Of course, but this delay — this vacillation!

DIRECTOR

He has been unfortunate. But everything may be regained.

RAMEAUX

(*Shuddering*) That's what Napoleon wired to Paris after Gravelotte!

(ORDERLY *opens door as before and goes out after* CHIEF OF STAFF *and* COLONEL BONNEL *enter.* THE CHIEF OF STAFF *is in the uniform of a Major-General with the Commander's cross and other decorations.* BONNEL, *who wears minor decorations, carries a large map. Both are men in the fifties*)

CHIEF

(*In surprise*) The General isn't here?

DIRECTOR

In his study. He left word he must not be disturbed.

CHIEF

Oh!

DIRECTOR

He has seen no one since eight o'clock. Since then the situation has become so serious I feel he must be told of it at once.

CHIEF

It is serious indeed.

DIRECTOR

Will you join me in calling the General?

CHIEF

(*Doubtfully*) In spite of his instructions? He is probably drawing up his orders now. He may come out any moment.

BONNEL

(*Who has spread his map out on the desk*) I have marked here the latest movements reported. (*They gather round the map;* RAMEAUX *walks to the tripod map, advances at certain places the tape showing the German line, and rejoins the group at the desk*) You see, they are coming in here, and here, and here. Already several dangerous salients are forming in our line.

CHIEF

Our line! Can we still call *that* a line?

BONNEL

And here in the center the Ninth army is being forced back upon the Marshes of St. Gond.

CHIEF

Where Napoleon bogged Blücher's Prussians in 1814. A trap, that place.

DIRECTOR

General, do you now agree that Paris must be sur-

rendered, and the offensive you recommended abandoned?

CHIEF

By no means, Director. Paris must stand a siege, and our field-armies turn and strike as soon as possible to relieve the city.

DIRECTOR

Your former opinion. I had thought the events of to-night would have brought you to my side.

BONNEL

What events?

DIRECTOR

Look at the map! Instead of halting for the night, as usual, the Germans are pressing ahead by forced marches.

CHIEF

Well?

RAMEAUX

Von Kluck's First army is already almost in touch with the outer forts of Paris.

DIRECTOR

The other German armies are crossing the Marne. The pressure on our troops increases hourly.

CHIEF

Still I ask, why surrender Paris?

DIRECTOR

Because the enemy's pursuit has now made it impossible to carry out your plan, even were it a good one.

RAMEAUX

We cannot reform now to fight behind the Seine. We must continue the retreat to the Loire.

DIRECTOR

Exactly. So why subject Paris to a hopeless siege?

RAMEAUX

The howitzers that destroyed Liége and Namur would breach the defenses in three days.

CHIEF

You are wrong. Paris must be defended.

RAMEAUX

If we go back to the Loire, as we must, how can the city be relieved in time?

CHIEF

We must not go back to the Loire.

DIRECTOR

You would let them take Paris by assault, when resistance would serve no military purpose? Think of the destruction, the horrors in the city —

RAMEAUX

Louvain!

DIRECTOR

No, Paris must be declared an open town and given up.

CHIEF

You speak of Paris as though it were Lille or Brussels. This is not primarily a military problem. Paris must be held, because the loss of Paris would break the heart of France.

BONNEL

And for that reason we cannot retreat to the Loire. All the armies must take the offensive on the Seine, to save Paris.

CHIEF

It is true that the city will be isolated from our armies before long —

DIRECTOR

Before morning!

CHIEF

But the city ought to hold out a week —

RAMEAUX

Not three days!

CHIEF

And in a week, if our offensive South of the Seine succeeds, we can advance and drive off the besiegers.

DIRECTOR

You are hypnotized by a word, Paris — a geographical term for a few acres of houses. To save Paris, you would ruin France. The armies cannot fight on the Seine. They are too tired, too disorganized.

CHIEF

They must fight somewhere!

BONNEL

Why not the Seine as well as the Loire?

DIRECTOR

To retreat to the Loire will gain ten days more. Our reserve of fresh troops is now eight divisions. It will then be twenty divisions. The enemy will get few reinforcements, Russia is moving, his lines of communication lengthen as he comes on.

RAMEAUX

Exactly. Our chances will be better on the Loire.

CHIEF

Sound military reasoning, yes. And fatal.

DIRECTOR

Explain that paradox.

CHIEF

The loss of Paris, followed by ten days' further retreat, will break the national will. In the eyes of the world — in her own eyes — France will be finished. Our armies will lack heart to fight.

RAMEAUX

If we allow our movements to be fettered by Paris, our armies will be destroyed.

BONNEL

Well, gentlemen, our views are unchanged. But the opinion that matters is the General's. What will he say?

CHIEF

I don't know.

DIRECTOR

He has not dropped a hint.

RAMEAUX

Do you think he knows himself?

BONNEL

I cannot think he will abandon Paris.

DIRECTOR

Why then did he tell the government to move to Bordeaux?

CHIEF

He foresaw the siege.

DIRECTOR

He foresaw that he must give up the city.

RAMEAUX

He's not made up his mind.

CHIEF

Surely he must by now have done so. Every hour increases the confusion, makes it harder to carry out a new plan.

RAMEAUX

We must all make that clear to the General.

BONNEL

Surely, Rameaux, it is more clear to him than to any of us.

RAMEAUX

I hope so.

DIRECTOR

At such a moment, none of us wish to criticize, to lose faith. But we must face facts. If the General, with his great gifts which we all recognize, has a weakness, it is our duty to try to overcome it.

CHIEF

Undoubtedly.

BONNEL

You mean?

DIRECTOR

In war as in chess, a bad plan is better than none.

CHIEF

A Fabian policy may be pushed to extremes.

DIRECTOR

The nettle must be grasped firmly.

CHIEF

And at once.

RAMEAUX

Enough pretty phrases. You mean that further

indecision, hesitation, vacillation, procrastination, call it what you will, is fatal!

BONNEL

(*After a pause*) That is unfair. I believe the General sees further and more clearly than any of us.

CHIEF

We all hope so, Bonnel.

RAMEAUX

How do you account then for his leaving the army commanders bewildered by conflicting orders, the Paris garrison not told whether to fight or get out, with the enemy almost at the forts?

BONNEL

(*Hesitating*) Local disasters may rightly be risked to gain time to work out a better strategic plan.

DIRECTOR

That thought underlies the strategy of these whole five weeks.

RAMEAUX

And it has given us the disasters before Metz, Namur, Charleroi, and now —

CHIEF

(*Sharply*) Rameaux! We must not say these things.

RAMEAUX

But only think them, General?

BONNEL

(*Warmly*) I for one do not think them. These disasters were not the fault of the command or the army. Germany chose her time for war. She was ready, we were not. She is reaping the fruits of her preparation. The General's has been the only strategy possible. He has conducted the retreat in a masterly manner.

(*The* GENERAL *opens the door, left, stands unnoticed for a moment. He wears a single decoration, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor*)

RAMEAUX

Wars are not won by retreats!

GENERAL

(*With smiling good-humor*) Good morning, gentlemen. (*They salute*) A council of war, I perceive.

DIRECTOR

General, the latest reports are very grave.

GENERAL

What are they?

DIRECTOR

The Germans are advancing by night. Von Kluck is almost in touch with the Paris forts.

GENERAL

Is that all?

RAMEAUX

The Paris command is begging us for orders.

BONNEL

They don't know whether you intend to evacuate the city, or to stand a siege.

RAMEAUX

They say the uncertainty makes it impossible for them to do anything. They will not be responsible for the consequences, unless you immediately —

GENERAL

Nerves, Rameaux, nerves. Never mind what they say.

CHIEF

The Sixth army in Paris is safe for the moment, but the Fifth, Fourth and British armies are hard pressed.

DIRECTOR

If our heavy guns are to cover the Seine crossings, there is barely time to get them into position. This will take at least twenty-four hours. But no orders have been given.

GENERAL

(*Coolly*) Surely, gentlemen, all this is scarcely surprising.

CHIEF

No, but most critical.

GENERAL

It was evident that as the enemy neared Paris he would try to disrupt and disorganize us, flurry us, by forced marches.

BONNEL

(*Surprised*) You anticipated these developments?

GENERAL

The campaign seems to pursue its normal course.

CHIEF

But the Paris garrison must have orders, to evacuate or to resist.

DIRECTOR

If you do not tell them at once, they will be unable to do either.

(*The* GENERAL *walks to the desk and studies the map*)

RAMEAUX

The wires to the army headquarters are all clear, waiting your orders, sir.

GENERAL

Thank you, Rameaux.

CHIEF

General, may I speak very frankly?

GENERAL

Of course.

CHIEF

It seems to me — I think to all of us — that unless you order the armies now to reform on the Seine —

DIRECTOR

— or go South to the Loire —

CHIEF

— unless you order Paris held —

DIRECTOR

— or abandoned —

CHIEF

— *now*, your orders will come — too late.

RAMEAUX

The confusion will be too great.

CHIEF

The situation will be out of our hands.

DIRECTOR

As Director of Operations, it is my duty to carry your orders into effect. I must warn you that in a few hours the *liaison* between our armies will be broken, and it will be impossible to put any general plan into execution.

GENERAL

Thank you, gentlemen, thank you. (*He lights a cigar*) In a few hours, I think you said, Director?

CHIEF

General, what do you propose to do?

GENERAL

I have not decided. (RAMEAUX *makes gesture of*

despair) I shall be glad to hear your views. Sit down. (*They pull up chairs, the* GENERAL *sits at the desk*) There are some cigarettes in the drawer there. (BONNEL *passes them around*) Now, your advice. What says the Chief of Staff?

CHIEF

The retreat has gone so far that our Western armies cannot engage the enemy before Paris. But the moral effects of the surrender of Paris would be fatal, therefore —

DIRECTOR

By that reasoning, we have lost the war already!

GENERAL

Your turn will come later, Director.

CHIEF

(*With an angry look at the* DIRECTOR) To continue. Since we cannot fight in front of Paris, and the city must be held, I advise that the garrison and the Sixth army be ordered to stand a siege. After losing touch with Paris the field-armies should reorganize South of the Seine and in a few days commence a general offensive. If successful, this will drive the enemy back and relieve the city.

GENERAL

And you, Director?

DIRECTOR

Such a course must result in disaster. Our one hope is to continue the retreat for at least ten days. Paris must be declared an open town and evacuated. The garrison and the Sixth army should retire with the field-armies to the Loire.

GENERAL

And Verdun, the line of the Meuse?

DIRECTOR

Must be abandoned too. On the line Belfort — Langres — the Loire, in about ten days, with twelve fresh reserve divisions, we can attack.

GENERAL

Bonnel?

BONNEL

I agree with the Chief of Staff. The moral consequences of the loss of Paris would be such that any military risks to save the city are justified.

GENERAL

Rameaux?

RAMEAUX

Our only hope lies in the *immediate* inauguration of the movement recommended by the Director. I have emphasized the adjective. There is barely time to get the troops out of Paris.

GENERAL

These are indeed divided counsels.

(*Pause*)

CHIEF

I believe the Director of Operations profoundly wrong. But I had rather you took his advice, to-night, than mine, in the morning. Time is now everything.

DIRECTOR

It would be better to adopt the Chief of Staff's plan now, bad as that is, than delay to-night and order the retreat to the Loire in the morning. Time is now all important.

GENERAL

(*With a hearty laugh*) This is the first time since this campaign began that you two men have agreed on anything!

BONNEL

But, General, which is your opinion?

GENERAL

(*Chuckling*) I'm sorry to break this unaccustomed concord, but I'm not sure that I agree with either.

CHIEF

With neither! But surely, Paris must be evacuated, or it must be defended!

DIRECTOR

And if we do not stand on the Seine, the retreat must continue!

GENERAL

(*Speaking for the first time sharply, in tones of command*) Rameaux! You say you are in touch with all the armies. What about my mass of maneuver, my strategic reserve?

RAMEAUX

The troops detached to the rear for the offensive — fourth corps, eleventh corps, 42nd division, 61st and 62nd reserve divisions — are concentrated as ordered, waiting instructions. I have a wire cleared to the general commanding.

GENERAL

(*Musingly*) The mass of maneuver — for the

offensive —" Napoleon's greatest gift to the art of war." Bonnel, you were there, you remember how old Blanchard used to roll that off his tongue in his lectures at St. Cyr? Old Whitehead, we boys used to call him. He saw the Emperor once. He was ten years old. He stood with his mother in the Rue de Rivoli, when the Grand Army came back from Austerlitz.

RAMEAUX

(*Muttering*) Austerlitz, indeed!

CHIEF

But the orders, sir! About Paris!

GENERAL

Well, gentlemen, what would you say if I sent the eight divisions of the mass of maneuver into Paris to join the Sixth army, and then ordered Gallieni to fire the districts on the left bank, blow up all the bridges, at once, without waiting for the forts to fall? (*They are astounded*) The garrison and the mass of maneuver, with the Sixth army, hold the right bank as long as possible. Then, when the Germans force the Seine, our men fight through the cellars from house to house until all Paris is blown down or burned over their heads.

CHIEF

But — but to what end?

GENERAL

The Director is right. The forts are worthless. The city cannot stand a siege.

DIRECTOR

But I suggested evacuation — not destruction!

RAMEAUX

You would destroy Paris?

CHIEF

If I am wrong, if Paris cannot stand a siege with a prospect of relief, then why not abandon the city, as the Director says?

BONNEL

Paris! Blown down! Burned!

GENERAL

I seem to have shocked you all. I too love Paris. But perhaps she must perish to save France.

DIRECTOR

But how can this destruction help the armies in the field?

GENERAL

The German plan is to envelop both my wings. If either attempt succeeds, we are lost. They are trying to roll up my right, before Nancy. Castelnau is holding the Bavarians there, and they will fail. But here on my left, von Kluck and Buelow's turning movement — well, as you have said, that is serious. If I left the garrison in Paris to stand a siege they would be captured to no purpose. If I abandoned Paris intact and retreated towards the Loire, the garrison, the Sixth army and the British would have to stand and give battle in the open, they would be beaten, and all my line to Verdun rolled up. The enemy's flanking movement must be held until I can save my center. The city can stop it, where armies in the field could not. Their big guns cannot destroy all the houses in Paris at once, as they will the forts. The garrison if I reinforce them can hold out in the cellars and the streets perhaps a week. And if Paris and Verdun can stop the Germans a week, my center armies can be extricated, reformed, and prepared for the offensive.

(*All have risen except the* GENERAL. They *are much affected*)

DIRECTOR

These are your orders?

GENERAL

Orders? Oh no, not orders. Mere speculation. As I said just now, I haven't decided. Please sit down. (*They do so*) I came across an amusing sidelight on the Boche mind just now, in my study. I was reading *La Vie Parisienne.* That those papers still appear in these times is a tribute to the national spirit.

RAMEAUX

You were reading *La Vie Parisienne* just now, in there?

GENERAL

You are right to be shocked. I suppose in your spare time you read Clausewitz *Vom Kriege?*

RAMEAUX

(*Severely*) I have no spare time, sir.

GENERAL

You know those darts that our airmen drop on the enemy? The Germans, the story said, regarded these as a barbarous invention. (ORDERLY *enters, stands at attention as* D'ARGOULLES *comes in, and goes out.* D'ARGOULLES *salutes*) You interrupted a story, Gaston. What is it?

D'ARGOULLES

The Wire Chief told me to give you this instantly, sir.

GENERAL

(*Takes paper, glances at it, lays it on the desk. To* D'ARGOULLES) Sit down and hear my story. (*He pulls up a chair*) The Germans felt deeply grieved at our barbarity. They debated the question of fitting reprisals. At length they made some darts — aeroplane darts, Gaston — and threw them on a squadron of French cavalry. One of them was picked up. On it was stamped: "Made in Germany. Invented in France."

(D'ARGOULLES *and the* GENERAL *alone laugh*)

CHIEF

(*Who has picked up the message*) My God!

DIRECTOR

What is it?

CHIEF

Marshal French reports that enemy cavalry groups are penetrating between his forces and the defenses of Paris! The English are about to lose all contact with our troops on their left!

(*General consternation, the* GENERAL *alone unmoved*)

BONNEL

Our line is breaking!

DIRECTOR

If the British lose connection with the Sixth army and Paris, and the enemy gets through the gap —

(*He breaks off*)

GENERAL

Don't be alarmed. It is my job to do the worrying here. And how should I not worry, when I have to decline so much excellent advice from my colleagues?

CHIEF

General, our fate is in the balance. There is not a moment to lose.

(*The* GENERAL *blows rings from his cigar*)

RAMEAUX

What are you going to do?

GENERAL

(*Rising*) I'm going to bed.

(*Astonishment*)

CHIEF

You will give no orders?

GENERAL

Not now — I want some sleep. If the armies get anxious, tell them to worry along as best they can.

Without committing themselves to any definite course of action. Emphasize that.

DIRECTOR

I beg you to order the retreat to the Loire, and cancel the provisional plans for an offensive, which are blocking the transport lines.

RAMEAUX

The decision! Are you going to fight or not?

GENERAL

(*Sharply*) Most battles are lost by Generals who make decisions before the decisive moment has arrived.

CHIEF

This is the decisive moment.

RAMEAUX

Or past it!

GENERAL

The Emperor said, "First engage the enemy, and then see." I have engaged him. I have not yet seen — not clearly enough.

BONNEL

But you will see!

(*The* GENERAL *thanks him with a look*)

DIRECTOR

But in another few hours, contact will have been lost between our armies. After that not Napoleon himself could save us.

GENERAL

"Another few hours"! "After that"! I said I was going to bed. I didn't say I was going to sleep round the clock! Come back here (*Looks at clock, then at map on desk*) — come back here at three. Then — then we *shall* see. (*The four officers go out reluctantly*) Gaston, I shall not go to my room.

D'ARGOULLES

You never do.

GENERAL

I'll lie down here on your couch. You know what that means?

D'ARGOULLES

No, General.

GENERAL

It means you will go to your quarters and to bed, and not get up until I send for you.

D'ARGOULLES

I must not leave you, sir. I'll wait outside in the passage.

GENERAL

(*Severely*) You'll go to bed, boy. You've been in this room four days.

D'ARGOULLES

Oh no, General.

GENERAL

Children mustn't go without their sleep.

D'ARGOULLES

I've slept a lot, here, at odd times. But you, General, I don't believe you've slept at all since the retreat began.

GENERAL

You don't know what I do in my study. You'd have roared to see Rameaux's face when I told them that while he and the others were fretting out here waiting for my orders I was reading *La Vie Parisienne* in there.

D'ARGOULLES

You — reading *La Vie Parisienne!*

GENERAL

Oh, I've wasted lots of time since Charleroi. I feel every now and then that I have to relax — forget it all for ten or twenty minutes —

D'ARGOULLES

You say nothing about the other twenty-three hours and forty minutes!

GENERAL

Do you know what they're all thinking now? Rameaux, the old rascal, is saying it. He'd fight any one who talks about me as he does.

D'ARGOULLES

What, General?

GENERAL

The army runs away, the enemy pursues, and the General — goes to bed!

D'ARGOULLES

Oh, damn them, sir!

GENERAL

I don't blame them. It is touch and go. But just now, when they wanted me to issue orders that could not be revoked, that would commit me beyond hope if I were wrong, something seemed to stop me. I don't know what. I felt it was not the moment. And the answer will come. I know that it will come.

D'ARGOULLES

Of course it will, sir.

GENERAL

But this thinking-box — I suppose the answer must be turned out of that. And the wheels are running slowly, Gaston. I think the machine will work better if I stop it, rest it.

D'ARGOULLES

I wish you'd do that more often, sir. That box holds the fate of France. You must take care of it.

(*He starts to go as the* GENERAL *sits on the couch*)

GENERAL

(*Half playfully, half seriously*) Gaston, what would you do in my place?

D'ARGOULLES

What do you mean, sir?

GENERAL

You have been with me, you alone, outside the staff, know the true position. Would you abandon Paris or fight?

D'ARGOULLES

General, you are laughing at me! You ask me this, me, a lieutenant?

GENERAL

I'm quite serious. The Chief of Staff wants to fight to relieve Paris, the Director wants to surrender the city and go on back. The rest all side with one or the other. Both factions are so prejudiced that no new facts can alter their views, which are in consequence entirely worthless. You alone among all of them here belong to neither clique.

D'ARGOULLES

I cannot — I am not worthy — I have no right to try to influence the supreme decision.

GENERAL

Your general demands your opinion.

D'ARGOULLES

(*Slowly*) To give battle — the battle without a morrow — risks the whole army. To retreat — to yield Paris — is equally perilous. If I believed in one course I would tell you so, if you insisted.

GENERAL

You believe in neither?

D'ARGOULLES

I am a lieutenant — how should I have faced the dilemma? I have no opinion.

GENERAL

And no hope?

D'ARGOULLES

I believe in you, sir.

GENERAL

(*Rising and putting hand on his shoulder*) Thanks, boy. That helps more than advice. And I — I too have faith. I believe in France. Now run along to bed!

(D'ARGOULLES *salutes, the* GENERAL *lies down on the couch as* D'ARGOULLES *blows out the lamp on the desk and goes out, right. The room is dimly lit by the moonlight, coming through the windows*)

(THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED AND RAISED TO DENOTE THE LAPSE OF AN HOUR)

SCENE II

The GENERAL *is asleep. He sits up, slowly rises and gropes about the room. He bumps into furniture as he feels his way, and is evidently walking in his sleep. His eyes are open, fixed in a rigid stare, but his stumbling and groping show that he sees nothing. After he has wandered about aimlessly for some time, the right hand door opens quietly and* D'ARGOULLES *comes in.*

D'ARGOULLES

General, I was in the passage. I heard you walking about. Shall I get a light? Do you want anything? (*He pauses for an answer; the* GENERAL *walks as before*) Are you angry because I did not go to bed? My place is beside you. (D'ARGOULLES *comes closer. He starts back in astonishment*) Asleep! He is asleep!

(*Goes forward to wake him, then pauses irresolutely*)

GENERAL

(*Suddenly stops, left, and stands in a rigid attitude of attention, staring across the room towards*

D'ARGOULLES, *who is standing by the desk, a shadowy form in the moonlight. Very sharply*) Who's there?

D'ARGOULLES

(*In a terrified voice*) It's only I, sir.

(*Goes out hurriedly, right, closing the door quietly. There is a short pause. The* GENERAL *maintains the same pose of strained attention and continues to stare towards the place where* D'ARGOULLES *stood by the desk*)

GENERAL

(*Shouts*) Who's there, I say?

VOICE

A soldier of France.

GENERAL

Your rank?

VOICE

(*After a moment's pause*) Corporal.

GENERAL

Your business here?

VOICE

To save the Army.

GENERAL

Where have you come from?

VOICE

Les Invalides.

(*A Form rustling the maps on the desk gradually becomes visible*)

GENERAL

My papers! Spy! (*He strides towards the desk. The* APPARITION *is now seen to be that of Napoleon, in the familiar cocked hat and cloak*) Corporal! The Little Corporal! (*Staggers back and collapses on the couch*) Les Invalides!

APPARITION

(*Mockingly*) You call yourself a soldier? (*The* GENERAL, *trembling, rises and salutes*) That's better. (*Acknowledging the salute*) This map! Are the enemy dispositions given here up to date?

GENERAL

Up to this evening, Sire.

APPARITION

(*Surprised*) This evening!

GENERAL

Our aeroplanes, Sire.

APPARITION

Yes, I forgot. If I had had just one at Quatre Bas! (*Gruffly*) Get rid of your cavalry. Obsolete arm. Did my men use bows and arrows, eh? Come here. (GENERAL *walks slowly to the desk*) Sit down. (GENERAL *sits at the desk*) Now. How did you get the army in this mess?

(*During this scene a ray of moonlight falls on the desk*)

GENERAL

(*Wearily*) It's a long story, Sire.

APPARITION

Your offensive failed. Why?

GENERAL

(*Pulls out a map from the pile on the desk; the* APPARITION *bends over him*) At the beginning I seized the mountain passes, I won through to the plains of the Saar. I attacked between Metz and Strasburg.

APPARITION

Well?

GENERAL

I was beaten at Morhange. I retreated to cover Nancy.

APPARITION

Why were you beaten?

GENERAL

Not enough guns.

APPARITION

(*Angrily*) Not enough guns! What was my career but guns, always guns? Austerlitz — those massed guns in the center — ever hear of Austerlitz? Where were your guns? Forgot to make 'em, eh?

GENERAL

The politicians, Sire.

APPARITION

I hope you wrung their necks! Well, and then?

GENERAL

(*Pulling out another map*) During my campaign in Lorraine the enemy came through Belgium in great strength. I had to re-group to meet the Belgian attack, which upset all my plans.

APPARITION

(*Snatching the map*) Your initial mobilization plans left the Belgian frontier unguarded. Why?

GENERAL

Germany had guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium. We did not think —

APPARITION

(*Throwing down the map in disgust*) You trusted the word of a Prussian? Fool!

GENERAL

Still I did not renounce the offensive.

APPARITION

(*Somewhat mollified*) Good!

GENERAL

As soon as I had regrouped I crossed the Meuse, and attacked in the Belgian Ardennes. There too I failed.

APPARITION

Why?

GENERAL

I depended on Namur to hold. It fell in two days. The enemy forced the Meuse. My line was broken. My left was outflanked. I had to go back.

APPARITION

Like that damned ass my nephew, you forgot one of my first principles. Never trust in a fortress!

GENERAL

Since then the retreat has continued. I planned to fight on the Somme, on the Aisne. But the German right wing threatened to turn the British. I had to go on back.

APPARITION

(*Picking up map, in tone of annoyance*) English, eh? Fighting in France, for us?

GENERAL

And fighting well, Sire. They have held the open flank.

APPARITION

(*In same tone*) Relentless foes

GENERAL

(*Interrupting*) — make the staunchest Allies, Sire.

APPARITION

How are their troops supplied?

GENERAL

The Straits of Dover, Sire.

APPARITION

Had I held those an hour! The seas are theirs, then, still?

GENERAL

The seas of all the world.

APPARITION

That rascal Villeneuve! I almost had them, once! England and France, Allies! It's hard to swallow, that!

GENERAL

But Prussia, Sire!

APPARITION

Yes, Prussia! Pigs, I always called them pigs. Is it so long since Jena, then, that they think to succeed where I failed?

GENERAL

They are strong, Sire, very strong!

APPARITION

But England's against them, now. They cannot beat the sea! A century is long to hold a grudge. We live and learn. Sometimes we die and learn. *Vive l'Angleterre!*

GENERAL

Their army, Sire, is small.

APPARITION

The sea is slow but sure. They'll come, in time.

Perhaps those others, too, beyond the seas.
Leave them the future. The present is our task.

GENERAL

(*Joyfully*) Ours, Sire? You'll help me now?

APPARITION

I felt that things were wrong. I could not rest in that great granite tomb. So I came here — and where else should I come?

GENERAL

To save the army, you said.

APPARITION

Tell me your plans. I'll help you, if I can.

GENERAL

(*Pointing on map as* APPARITION *sits beside him*)
My left is being forced back on Paris.

APPARITION

Still retreating, eh?

GENERAL

I have not stopped the retreat, but the decision must be made to-night. I must fight in Paris, fight on the Seine to relieve Paris, or go back to the Loire.

APPARITION

And abandon the city? Nonsense. If Paris was worth a mass, it is worth a battle.

GENERAL

Their big guns will smash the forts, but the garrison fighting through the houses may delay the enemy, save my right from envelopment.

APPARITION

Fighting through the houses! Would you destroy Paris, you vandal? You're not a German!

GENERAL

To save the city is impossible.

APPARITION

(*Sharply*) That word is not French!

GENERAL

I thought to gain time to save my center armies by adding to the Paris garrison my mass of maneuver.

APPARITION

You have a mass of maneuver? Then I have taught you something!

GENERAL

Eight fresh divisions, Sire.

APPARITION

(*Coldly*) Who invented the mass of maneuver?

GENERAL

You, Sire.

APPARITION

What did I use it for?

GENERAL

To throw in at the critical moment —

APPARITION

When the battle was ripe —

GENERAL

For the offensive. To break the enemy's line.

APPARITION

(*Angrily*) Exactly. You know that. And you — you have your fresh troops. And you propose with the rest of your armies to retreat, while you throw your reserves into Paris to fight on the *defensive* — the *defensive* — let them cut off your field army from your mass of maneuver, and destroy the city into the bargain. You fight like an Austrian!

GENERAL

I have done nothing yet, Sire. The position is not compromised.

APPARITION

You have not committed yourself?

GENERAL

No.

APPARITION

Show me your dispositions. (GENERAL *points to map, the* APPARITION *studies it for a few moments*) And in this desperate situation, you have issued no orders, you have decided on no measures, you have not even moved your reserves?

GENERAL

No. My staff has been pressing me to decide —

APPARITION

Of course it has. How well I know those staffs! Chattering like magpies, eh?

GENERAL

But I have felt the moment had not come.

APPARITION

(*With emphatic approval*) You have known how to wait.

GENERAL

It has been hard.

APPARITION

The hardest thing in war.

GENERAL

I delayed. I didn't know why. I must have been waiting for you.

APPARITION

Had you not waited, I could not have saved you. You have mastered without me the lesson I could never teach my marshals. (*Studies the map*) The old arrogance! Men of one idea, these Prussians. Envelopment! Know nothing else of war. Well, well, we'll humor them.

GENERAL

Show me, Sire, show me!

APPARITION

The moment is at hand to strike!

GENERAL

(*Joyfully*) The offensive?

APPARITION

They're fooling you with this march on Paris. Do you understand? They're fooling you!

GENERAL

How so, Sire?

APPARITION

These two armies on their right, marked von Kluck and Buelow — they can't go on like this. Not unless you retreat and let them do it. They're fooling you, I say! Don't let yourself be tricked.

GENERAL

I don't understand.

APPARITION

Take the present line of march of the two armies. Suppose they continue for twelve hours more in the same directions, on these roads here, you see?

Where do you find them then?

GENERAL

(*Picks up scales and works on the map*) They will drift apart! There will be a gap of thirty miles!

APPARITION

Well?

GENERAL

They can't do that. They must close the gap at once.

APPARITION

How?

GENERAL

Either halt all their armies to rectify their line

APPARITION

Halt? You don't know your Prussians! They'll never stop — they think they've got you, they'll press the pursuit.

GENERAL

Then, if Buelow and the others keep on advancing, von Kluck must turn to the left and march to the Southeast to maintain contact with Buelow — (*Leaping up*) — I see, I see, Sire! — he marches across my front! He presents me his flank!

APPARITION

(*Scornfully*) And meanwhile your armies retreat, your garrison and mass of maneuver crouch in the cellars of Paris —

GENERAL

No, I attack! I attack! He offers me his flank, I strike him in the flank! I crush his army, I roll up the German right!

APPARITION

(*Chuckling*) Not so fast, my son. You attack, yes. But they'll swing reserves over to help von

Kluck. He's very strong. You might not roll him up.

GENERAL

(*Crestfallen*) Surely I try it?

APPARITION

Yes, but that isn't all. We must make sure of this. (*Bends over map — chuckles*) Why, it's as simple as Marengo.

GENERAL

Tell me, Sire, tell me!

APPARITION

Eighteen fourteen — the marshes of St. Gond — is that little bit of work still remembered?

GENERAL

Your masterpiece, Sire.

APPARITION

Gave old Blücher a hiding, eh? Prussians they were then, too. Good omen, that. Now listen. Our strategic reserve we divide in half, so. (*Pointing*) One half comes to the Paris army. The other half concentrates in the center, so, behind your Ninth army. All armies stop the retreat at once and prepare to attack in twenty-four hours.

GENERAL

They cannot get ready in a day.

APPARITION

They must! During to-day the Sixth army moves out from Paris. At daybreak to-morrow it attacks the flank von Kluck will have exposed, so! His position of course is compromised, he must stop, form front to flank, call for reserves to save himself, so! Over here in the center you retreat, during the first two days of the battle. The enemy will pursue. On the third day, whether you are winning or losing against von Kluck — (*The* APPARITION *has risen*) do you see?

GENERAL

(*Breathlessly*) Go on!

APPARITION

Why, then, my son, the battle is ripe! You throw in the second half of the mass of maneuver, for the decision!

GENERAL

But where?

APPARITION

Why, in the same old place!

GENERAL

The Marshes of St. Gond!

APPARITION

They'll remember Blücher, when it is too late.

GENERAL

Eighteen fourteen again!

APPARITION

His line will be weak there, stretched forward where he has pursued your center, the bogs in his rear, his reserves moved sixty miles to the west to help von Kluck.

GENERAL

I break his line in the center! I throw him into the marshes! He must retreat everywhere at once, whatever happens on the wings. The battle is won! (*The* APPARITION *begins to move away. The* GENERAL *rises*) I see it! but your brain is lightning, Sire! Tell me again — more fully — more details. — I may have missed some point.

(*Walks after the phantom*)

APPARITION

(*Halting, motions the* GENERAL *towards the study-door*) We'll have time and enough to fight this over, Comrade, when you come to stay with me.

GENERAL

To stay with you, Sire? Where?

APPARITION

Les Invalides.

(*The* APPARITION *passes through the doorway on the left, followed by the* GENERAL. *The door closes*)

(*There is a soft knock, followed by a louder one, on the other door. The door is opened.* D'ARGOULLES *retreats into the room, protestingly, before* RAMEAUX *and the* DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS. *They halt by the doorway. A little light shines through from the hall upon them, but the room remains in shadow, and the intruders, who cannot see that the couch is empty, speak throughout this scene in whispers*)

D'ARGOULLES

Gentlemen, I protest against this intrusion.

RAMEAUX

When members of the staff desire to see the General, they are not to be ordered away by subalterns.

D'ARGOULLES

The General's orders were to be called at three o'clock. It is not yet two. I beg you to withdraw. He needs rest. You do not know how badly.

DIRECTOR

This is no time for any one to rest.

(*The* CHIEF OF STAFF *and* COLONEL BONNEL *enter*)

CHIEF

What's the matter?

RAMEAUX

M. le Marquis d'Argoulles has had the misfortune to forget that since the first of August he has been Lieutenant d'Argoulles.

D'ARGOULLES

Lieutenant d'Argoulles, personal aide-de-camp to the Generalissimo.

BONNEL

You propose to wake the General?

D'ARGOULLES

Against his explicit orders not to be disturbed.

RAMEAUX

Insolent puppy!

D'ARGOULLES

(*Standing at attention*) After the war, Major, my friends shall have the honor to wait upon you.

RAMEAUX

(*Furiously*) You hear? A challenge!

CHIEF

How can any Frenchman quarrel, to-night?

DIRECTOR

And here, here of all places!

D'ARGOULLES

You are right, Sirs. Major, I beg your pardon.
(RAMEAUX *grunts*)

CHIEF

(*To* DIRECTOR) What will you say to him?

DIRECTOR

A new situation has arisen on the Meuse. The Germans are massing to attack Fort Troyon, cross the river, and take Verdun and Sarrail's army in the rear.

CHIEF

Surely this is not so serious as the position before Paris.

DIRECTOR

No, but it is new, it gives us a pretext to wake him. He must decide on a general plan. Every minute

that he sleeps here may be the last possible minute when his orders can save us.

CHIEF

Yes, I have been sitting in my room, every tick of the clock sounding in my ears like the death-knell of the army.

RAMEAUX

You are all afraid! I will do it! (*Lights match, goes to the couch, says aloud*) He isn't here!

(*They all advance in surprise, and now speak aloud*)

CHIEF

Not here! (*To* D'ARGOULLES) He hasn't gone out?

D'ARGOULLES

No. I have been in the passage.

(*They look at the study-door*)

BONNEL

He is in there, working.

DIRECTOR

He said he was going to bed!

CHIEF

He is drawing up his orders at last.

RAMEAUX

Reading *La Vie Parisienne,* more likely.

DIRECTOR

Why did he tell us he wanted to sleep?

(RAMEAUX *goes towards study door,* D'ARGOULLES *makes appealing gesture to the others*)

BONNEL

Rameaux, one moment! Gentlemen, our nerves, yours and mine, are almost gone.

RAMEAUX

And well they may be.

BONNEL

One man only at headquarters is cool — the General. One man is quiet and confident — the General. He said he was going to bed because he wanted to get rid of us, to prepare his plan. He told us to come back at three o'clock.

DIRECTOR

But there is no time to lose.

CHIEF

Bonnel is right. The responsibility for delay is not ours. We must wait another hour.

(*Goes out, followed by* BONNEL. D'ARGOULLES *stands by the door at attention as* RAMEAUX *and the* DIRECTOR *reluctantly depart, then goes out, closing the door behind him. After a pause the study-door opens. The* GENERAL, *still asleep, his eyes open but fixed, gropes his way to the desk, picks up pen and scales and works for some time over the map. Then he rises, walks to the great tripod map and by gesture indicates the plan of the Battle of the Marne — the flanking attack from Paris against von Kluck, followed by the blow against the German center. He stumbles to the couch and lies down*)

(THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED TO INDICATE THAT AN HOUR PASSES).

SCENE III

(*The curtain rises on the same scene. The* GENERAL *is sleeping quietly. The stage is dark, there is no more moon.* D'ARGOULLES *enters and lights the lamp on the desk — it is just three by the clock on the wall — and the four Staff Officers come in*)

D'ARGOULLES

(*Walks to the couch and calls*) General! (*The* GENERAL *stirs*) It is three o'clock!

GENERAL

(*Sits up and rubs his eyes, points to the desk*) The map! that map! (D'ARGOULLES *hands it to him as he rises. He looks at it in great surprise for a moment. The quiet, nonchalant manner adopted in his earlier scene with his Officers now gives way to brusqueness*) Rameaux, take these orders. (RAMEAUX *sits at desk and writes*) "Half of my mass of maneuver — Fourth Corps, 61st and 62d Reserve Divisions — will proceed to Paris at once and march out to reinforce the Sixth Army, which will be in action when they arrive. The Sixth Army under Manoury, with the mobile garrison of Paris, will leave the city immediately, move North to-day, and

attack von Kluck at dawn to-morrow, driving him back upon the Ourcq. The attack must be delivered at dawn, in twenty-four hours; I will tolerate no excuses, no delay." Put those orders on the wire instantly.

(*All four Officers are astounded and dismayed*)

RAMEAUX

(*Rises with the sheet of paper in his hand*) But, General —

CHIEF

You cannot attack von Kluck, now!

BONNEL

You are trying to save Paris?

GENERAL

Not a shell shall touch the city!

DIRECTOR

You propose to attack by forced marches, with a few beaten brigades, a great army, flushed with victory, backed by heavy guns?

RAMEAUX

General, this is madness, ruin!

GENERAL

Put those orders on the wire!

CHIEF

At least explain this amazing plan!

GENERAL

As you well said three hours ago, there is no time to lose.

(*Points to the door,* D'ARGOULLES *opens it;* RAMEAUX *reluctantly goes out.* D'ARGOULLES *shuts the door. There is a moment of silence*)

DIRECTOR

(*Bitterly, to the* CHIEF OF STAFF) I hope you are satisfied, General. You have got your offensive!

CHIEF

My offensive! I wanted to stop behind the Seine, to reorganize, rest, before attacking!

GENERAL

(*With his eyes on the map*) The orders for the other armies! Will you take them, Bonnel?

BONNEL

General, will you not discuss your plan?

DIRECTOR

You fling a few disorganized divisions without guns into the enemy's mouth!

CHIEF

Even the reserves cannot get up in time — you said the Sixth army would be in action when they arrived.

DIRECTOR

In action! In German prison pens! You send us piece-meal to be gobbled up!

BONNEL

(*Weeping*) I, too, General, beg you to reconsider.

GENERAL

(*Who has listened patiently, puts down the map; with a laugh to* BONNEL) *Et tu, Brute?*

CHIEF

Do you refuse to listen to us?

GENERAL

Of course not. I'm sorry that I was rude, but the orders for the Sixth army were instant. I could not discuss *them*. The Sixth army moves first. I will dictate the other orders in five minutes. That time is at your disposal.

DIRECTOR

Five minutes, to decide the fate of France!

GENERAL

(*Somewhat vaguely*) I think the fate of France has been decided.

(*The* GENERAL *sits at the desk and lights a cigar. His poise and confidence as this scene progresses begin to impress the others, without converting them*)

DIRECTOR

Such a proposal as this was never heard of in military history.

GENERAL

Then it is probable, Director, that the move will surprise the enemy no less than it has surprised my staff.

(RAMEAUX *re-enters*)

CHIEF

To bring the Sixth army out from Paris to-day and organize for attack in twenty-four hours is impossible.

GENERAL

That word is not French!

BONNEL

(*To* RAMEAUX) That's what the Emperor used to tell *his* staff!

DIRECTOR

There is not enough military transport in the city to move five divisions twenty-five miles in a day.

GENERAL

There are eight thousand taxicabs.

BONNEL

That's true.

RAMEAUX

Von Kluck's army is victorious — it has not been disorganized by defeat and flight — it contains nine divisions. You propose to throw against it five beaten divisions.

GENERAL

The units of the Sixth army have not been badly hammered, like our other troops.

CHIEF

And the four other divisions you order up from the strategic reserve to support the attack cannot go in until the third day.

GENERAL

The second day.

RAMEAUX

They cannot —

GENERAL

(*Decisively*) They must!

DIRECTOR

Assume the impossible. Assume that the Sixth army to-morrow, tired, without guns, defeats von Kluck's present force. Still your plan is fatal!

GENERAL

I am listening.

DIRECTOR

Because we cannot send help from our center armies. They have gone back too far. And von Kluck can bring reserves from his left, from Buelow's army, even from Hausen's, to defeat our attacking force.

GENERAL

Exactly. That is all I ask him to do.

CHIEF

I don't understand that remark. But I agree with the Director that in these circumstances the forces you propose to use cannot defeat von Kluck by a frontal attack.

GENERAL

(*Rather vaguely*) I did not use the adjective.

CHIEF

What do you mean?

GENERAL

(*Blowing rings from his cigar*) You have not foreseen all the circumstances.

DIRECTOR

I think, gentlemen, we all desire to impress on the General our belief that this attack cannot possibly, in *any* circumstances, defeat von Kluck.

(*They all nod,* BONNEL *doubtfully, the others vigorously*)

GENERAL

I incline to agree. I do not expect it to defeat von Kluck.

(*They are bewildered*)

RAMEAUX

You order an attack which you admit will fail?

GENERAL

(*Looking at clock*) When you permit me to complete dictating my orders, our plan of battle will become more clear.

DIRECTOR

If von Kluck wins — and you admit he will — not only is Paris lost, but our left flank is routed!

GENERAL

I promised you five minutes. Two yet remain.

BONNEL

Go on, General, please.

(*The others are silent*)

GENERAL

(*Decisively again*) Very well. Rameaux, take these orders. (*He dictates from the map*) "All the armies of the left and center except the Sixth will halt where they are. They will spend to-day in re-forming and reorganizing. They will attack the enemy at dawn to-morrow."

CHIEF

A general offensive!

GENERAL

(*Continuing*) "The British army will re-cross the Marne and drive in between von Kluck and von Buelow."

DIRECTOR

But von Kluck is already across the Marne! The British cannot re-cross without a battle!

GENERAL

"The Fifth army will fall upon von Buelow. On our right, Castelnau's Second army will continue to

stand firm before Nancy, and Sarrail's Third army covering Verdun will attack the Crown Prince. In the center — in the center "— (*His voice rises*) " between the Fifth and Third armies, General Foch, with the Ninth army, will attack weakly on the first day, just holding von Buelow's left and von Hausen's Saxons. On the second day he will retreat three miles, holding the Southern exits to the marshes of St. Gond. The enemy will pursue, hoping to break our center. Foch will retire again on the third day, back to where the second half of the mass of maneuver —

RAMEAUX

(*Writing*) — Eleventh corps, Forty-Second division —

GENERAL

— will be waiting for him. During the three days, the German reserves will have been drawn to their left, to meet the flanking attack from Paris. When the dispatch of reserves to von Kluck and the salient produced by the German pursuit of the Ninth army has weakened the enemy center, Foch will turn and throw in his fresh troops, the mass of maneuver, kept in reserve until the battle is ripe — *until the battle is ripe* —

CHIEF

(*To* DIRECTOR) Napoleon's phrase again!

GENERAL

— upon the junction between the Prussian Guard and the Saxons, rupturing the German line and throwing back the Guard into the Marshes of St. Gond." (*He rises and drops the map and repeats as in a trance*) The Marshes of St. Gond! The same old place!

BONNEL

(*In awe*) Eighteen fourteen again!
(*They are all much impressed*)

GENERAL

(*Who has seemed bewildered, as though trying to remember something, recovers himself and resumes dictation*) "The enemy will then be forced to retreat instantly all along the line, even if he is winning before Paris. When this occurs all our armies will press the pursuit."

BONNEL

Then whether the Sixth army defeats von Kluck does not matter?

GENERAL

Not if it keeps him busy for three days.

CHIEF

I believe this plan must bring disaster.

RAMEAUX

Here are three reasons why your plan must fail First, the morale —

GENERAL

(*Rises*) Gentlemen, you all disapprove my plan You oppose my battle orders. Very good. I overrule your objections. My decision is made. It is irrevocable. The new plan will be put into execution immediately. You will all get to work at once, and above all, impress on the field commanders that time is everything. Delay or faltering will not be pardoned.

(*They look at one another*)

DIRECTOR

There seems nothing more to be said.

(*They all salute. The* GENERAL *returns the salute*)

RAMEAUX

I have made my protest. You may count on me to do my utmost.

GENERAL

Of course, Rameaux, I know that.

CHIEF

Your plan is now ours. I forget every objection every doubt.

DIRECTOR

I am your subordinate, no longer your adviser. I will execute the orders.

(*Takes the sheet of paper from* RAMEAUX)

BONNEL

It is the first time I have ever doubted you, General. But your head is worth ten like mine.

(*The four Officers go out, all much depressed.* D'ARGOULLES *closes the door after them*)

D'ARGOULLES

Did you get much sleep, sir?

GENERAL

I am a new man. But didn't I tell you to go to bed and not get up until I sent for you?

D'ARGOULLES

(*Abashed*) I must apologize for intruding. I heard you. I thought you might want something.

GENERAL

Intruding? What do you mean?

D'ARGOULLES

I mean when I came in here, and you shouted at me.

GENERAL

You came in here?

D'ARGOULLES

Yes, twice, sir.

GENERAL

When?

D'ARGOULLES

After you went to sleep. Don't you remember calling out at me?

GENERAL

What are you talking about?

D'ARGOULLES

(*Surprised*) You must have been asleep all the time!

GENERAL

Have you gone mad, Gaston?

D'ARGOULLES

You were walking in your sleep, sir. I thought I woke you and that you recognized me. But I see now — you were still asleep when you called.

GENERAL

You found me sleep-walking in here?

D'ARGOULLES

Yes, sir.

GENERAL

That's very odd. I've never done that, boy. What was I doing?

D'ARGOULLES

I was in the passage, about half past one.

GENERAL

(*Shaking his finger*) You didn't go to bed at all, then!

D'ARGOULLES

I heard footsteps, so I came in here. It was dark. You were stumbling about. I saw you were sleep-walking. I wondered whether to wake you. I was afraid you might hurt yourself. But when I came towards you you called out.

GENERAL

What did I say?

D'ARGOULLES

"Who's there?" you said, and I thought I *had* wakened you. I said, "It's only I, sir," and went out.

GENERAL

(*Vaguely*) It's very strange. (*Putting hand to*

head) There was some queer dream I had. You came in twice, you said?

D'ARGOULLES

The second time you weren't here.

GENERAL

(*Startled*) Not here! Of course I was here.

D'ARGOULLES

No, sir.

GENERAL

Nonsense. It was dark. You didn't see me on the couch.

D'ARGOULLES

Oh, no, sir. Rameaux struck a light.

GENERAL

What's that?

D'ARGOULLES

The staff wanted to wake you. They had some news. There was some talk by the door. Then Rameaux lit a match.

GENERAL

Well?

D'ARGOULLES

You weren't on the couch. You were in the study.

GENERAL

(*Incredulous*) The study!

D'ARGOULLES

The door was shut.

GENERAL

It's open, now!

D'ARGOULLES

Bonnel persuaded the others not to call you. We went out, came back at three and found you asleep.

GENERAL

Well, I'll be damned! I'm no somnambulist! The study! (*Goes and looks through the door, returns to desk*) When I woke up just now (*pointing*), I asked you for that map.

D'ARGOULLES

Yes, sir.

GENERAL

I knew I had made up my mind. I was ready to dictate the orders. But I found, on the map, I had marked it all down. It's very odd, Gaston, but I don't remember doing that!

D'ARGOULLES

Perhaps you did it in your sleep. (*The* GENERAL *muses*) It's wonderful, your plan, if I may say so, sir.

GENERAL

So you took it all in, eh, you rascal?

D'ARGOULLES

(*Enthusiastically*) The attack on the flank, the retreat in the center, and then the decisive blow on the third day!

GENERAL

I'm glad you like it, boy. The others don't. They don't think the Sixth army can hold up von Kluck long enough. And he *must* be stopped for three days, so the center attack can come off.

D'ARGOULLES

Of course they'll hold him, sir.

GENERAL

Yes, I feel that. They will. But how? That's what stumps me. All that the others said is sound, Gaston. I could not answer them. But they are wrong. Somehow, I know they're wrong. I don't know why.

D'ARGOULLES

How did it come to you, your plan?

GENERAL

(*After a pause*) How did it come? Do we ever know how these things come?

D'ARGOULLES

You said before you went to sleep you knew it would.

GENERAL

We rack our brains for days and nights over some problem that is too much for us, we think until we can think no longer, and then — the answer comes! Where does it come from, Gaston? Tell me that!

D'ARGOULLES

You asked me to-night how to beat the Germans. Now you ask me something harder — to explain the miracle of Inspiration.

GENERAL

Inspiration! I suppose that's what it was. I had worked out something quite different. It took me four days. I was wrong. God, how wrong I was! It would have brought disaster, that plan. It was the best I could do. I was going to put it into execution. But something stopped me. Something told me to wait. The armies seemed falling to pieces, through my indecision. My staff doubted me, to-night they began to despise me. Still there

was something that wouldn't let me take the decision, the wrong decision. Then — this came. Not from within me. From something outside. Where did it come from?

D'ARGOULLES

The artist knows that his masterpiece — his poem, his statue, or his plan of battle — doesn't come from his own brain.

GENERAL

Where does it come from, then?

D'ARGOULLES

In the old days, he thought some god or dead hero had inspired him.

GENERAL

(*Laughing*) Ghosts — visions — eh? You don't believe in that claptrap? (D'ARGOULLES *laughs*) What's the answer, though? It's very strange about that map. I wonder if I was asleep!

D'ARGOULLES

What did you dream about, sir?

GENERAL

(*Vaguely*) Oh, the armies, of course. Some of the Emperor's old campaigns, I think, all jumbled up with this one. And maps, and plans, and the battles

last month. Well, we mustn't gossip here like old women! There's a campaign on, boy!

(*As he turns to go out,* RAMEAUX *bursts in followed by the* CHIEF OF STAFF, *the* DIRECTOR *and* BONNEL, *all in joyous excitement.*)

RAMEAUX

General, your plan! An inspiration! You've got them!

GENERAL

What's the matter?

DIRECTOR

A masterpiece of strategy! But how did you know?

GENERAL

Know what, Director?

CHIEF

We all thought your plan brilliant. But there was one fatal objection.

BONNEL

We didn't think the Sixth army could hold von Kluck three days so your blow in the center could come off.

GENERAL

(*Impatiently*) Well?

RAMEAUX

Von Kluck has walked into your trap!

DIRECTOR

It was the very moment for the offensive! But how did you know?

GENERAL

You seem to have some surprising news about von Kluck.

CHIEF

He has turned aside from Paris!

RAMEAUX

To the South-east! He is marching with his right flank exposed to the attack you ordered!

GENERAL

(*Bewildered and astonished*) His flank? His flank? He presents me his flank? But is this possible? Why should he do that? How do you know?

BONNEL

From three separate sources, sir, all reliable, all independent, all in agreement.

GENERAL

You are sure there is no mistake?

CHIEF

No, sir. All von Kluck's troops are marching across our front.

GENERAL

(*Struggles to remember, but cannot; the others are surprised at his attitude*) His flank, of course. His flank! Why am I so surprised?

BONNEL

You are not well, sir. The strain has been too much.

DIRECTOR

You didn't know? Is this an accident?

RAMEAUX

(*To* CHIEF) He didn't know! It's all luck.

GENERAL

I knew about their flank march! Why am I so surprised? My whole plan was based on that! My whole plan!

DIRECTOR

How did you know von Kluck would make that move?

GENERAL

(*Bewildered*) How did I know? How did I

know? Never mind that now. Go on. Tell me more.

CHIEF

Your plan is feasible, *now*.

RAMEAUX

The English can recross the Marne, as you said, for when we attack to-morrow von Kluck must recall his advanced troops over the river, and form front to flank.

GENERAL

(*Repeats vaguely*) Of course. Form front to flank!

DIRECTOR

It was the *frontal* attack on von Kluck that we thought madness.

BONNEL

You said you hadn't used that adjective!

GENERAL

(*Vaguely*) Why, yes. So I did!

RAMEAUX

(*Who has picked up the map from the desk*) What damned fools we've all been!

CHIEF

What's the matter?

RAMEAUX

He knew it all along! Look here! (*They crowd around the map, the* GENERAL *with the others*) He has marked von Kluck's flank march across our front on this map!

BONNEL

He *had* marked the map when we came in and woke him!

DIRECTOR

Of course he had! He dictated his orders from it!

GENERAL

(*Still somewhat dazed, takes the map*) Why, so I did! (*Triumphantly*) I see it now! Of course, I thought of that!

DIRECTOR

But how did you know?

GENERAL

He had to make that flank march. He was drifting apart from Buelow's army. He had to close the gap. It would have opened by morning. This march to the South-east across our flank was forced on him. He had to do it to keep in touch with Buelow. I worked it out. I don't remember when. But I knew he'd do it! My whole plan was based on that!

(*They are all overwhelmed*)

RAMEAUX

Will you let *me* read that *Vie Parisienne?*

GENERAL

(*Laughing*) Come, let's all get to work. The campaign is proceeding— according to plan!

RAMEAUX

And what a plan! A plan worthy of Napoleon himself!

GENERAL

(*Halting near the door*) We owe everything we know of war to the Great Captain, comrades. *Vive l'Empereur!*

(*They echo the cry "Vive l'Empereur" as they go out*)

CURTAIN